DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 391 CS 208 811

AUTHOR Davis, Diana F.
TITLE International Perspectives on New Models for English Teaching: An Australian View.
PUB DATE 18 Nov 84
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (74th, Detroit, MI, November 16-21, 1984).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Theories; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Curriculum; *English Instruction; Teaching Methods; *Teaching Models
IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

Because of the inadequacy of the three models of English teaching in Australia (the skills, personal growth, and cultural heritage models) in carrying the impact of English instruction beyond its own confines, a new model--the person-process model--is necessary. The model focuses on the individual, but serves to locate individuals in their life context or world. The base spheres represent, in order of the importance with which they impinge on individuals in our society, the spatial/environmental contexts in which they must learn to operate. These overlap and relate to a number of people-oriented contexts in which individuals must interact and transact through listening and speaking, reading and writing. This framework attempts to provide the teacher with an overview of the facets of the individual's world and a perspective on those contexts to which a teacher might properly make a contribution. (EL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED260391

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON NEW MODELS FOR ENGLISH TEACHING: AN AUSTRALIAN VIEW

by

Diana F. Davis

Monash University

Australia

SESSION D7 - NCTE Convention, Detroit - November 18, 1984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. F. Davis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

I want to look briefly today at three aspects of English teaching in Australia - where we've been, where we are, and where we might go from here. We are now two hundred years on in Australia's history and Australians are still coming to terms with the diversity that is Australia's nationhood. Those of you who were at the IFTE Seminar last week will have realized that the English teaching profession in Australia specifically, as well as the community at large, have yet to come to terms with the rich linguistic diversity that has accrued especially in the last half decade from Europe and from Asia in particular.

Australian English teaching has, somewhat peripatetically, moved mainly among the three models of English teaching which were identified at the Dartmouth Conference as the skills model, the personal growth model, and the cultural heritage model. Since Dartmouth and under the influence of people like John Dixon and Jimmy Britton, the Australian English teaching profession has leaned more strongly in both precept and practice towards the personal

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CS208811

growth model - although it must be acknowledged that there is still a considerable gap between enlightened precept on the part of administrators and teacher educators on the one hand and much classroom practice on the other.

The late sixties and seventies witnessed a revulsion against the cultural heritage model which was seen to alienate those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Relevance was seen to be a major criterion for the English classroom and very strong arguments were mounted to establish the incontrovertible irrelevance of classical English literature - Shakespeare, Chaucer and the Leavisite Great Tradition. Indeed, in the years that followed, the validity of literature in the classroom has been questioned and the decision made by some teachers that it is inappropriate for their classes. Molly Travers, one of my doctoral graduates, has demonstrated that students in many of our schools are not exposed to poetry in the classroom because teachers do not want to see the poetry they love maligned and mauled by an unresponsive class.

There was an equally virulent movement against the skills model which was seen to be epitomised by the grammatical exercise industry, the spelling list, the transcription task, and their ilk. The reality that these provided the staple of many English classrooms only served to strengthen the revolt against skills per se. The attempt to inculcate skills in students was perceived to be a somewhat obscene cop out on the part of the teacher. The obscenity was seen to lie not only in the mindlessness of skills oriented tasks for the student but also in the ease with which they could be corrected as either right or wrong by the teacher. It was argued that English should not be seen as a precise discipline like Mathematics where notions of

correctness and incorrectness could be applied with impunity. English with all its affective possibilities was seen as inherently indefinable, possessed of unlimited possibilities which defied, by their very nature, attempts at rigorous measurement.

The rejection of these models and the reasons for this rejection led inevitably to the acceptance, almost as a credo, of the personal growth model - that model which was characterized on a number of occasions at the IFTE Seminar last week as overly romantic. Now, virtually two decades post Dartmouth, the appropriateness and adequacy of this model must be evaluated both in terms of its record and the needs of the present and future. At its best the model has provided teachers with a basis for considering the individual's idiosyncratic needs in the classroom. The emphasis on starting where the child is, on valuing the child's personal experience and capacity to make genuine contributions to his own learning and that of others around him are very important.

The research and curriculum development seeded by the model have also been extremely beneficial. There has been, as a result, a change in the power structure of many classrooms and a concomitant emphasis on the child as learner in all disciplines across the curriculum. The work of Graves and others has attempted to liberate the child from the burden of countless products by providing a pride in process, and by highlighting the satisfactions of crafting towards the goal of an end product which is valued by both child and audience.

But we don't seem yet to have genuinely probed the efficacy of the model as a basis for practice into the twenty

first century? If one is honest and objective, the evidence suggests that the personal growth model has certain inherent problems and deficiencies. At its worst it is clearly capable of generating egocentrism and self-indulgence or what the Italians would call "pensa soltanto a se stesso". This phrase which translates as "he cares for nothing but self" highlights one of its essential paradoxes and causes one to question a model which holds as its underlying dictum the centrality of self.

More recent models which have been proposed but have remained at the precept discussion level and have thus not influenced practice significantly are the Robinson Language as Resource model, and the Boomer Cultural Studies model. In essence the Robinson model argues for language to be seen as a resource (as distinct from the language as system view which is the fortress of the skills model), and proposes a language functions model derived largely from adult uses of language.

While this model does offer many positive possibilities it gave rise to suspicion on the part of some English teachers at the time Robinson introduced it in the mid seventies because it was seen to provide a basis for the demise of English teaching. Language as resource was perceived to translate too readily into English teachers performing a service role in classrooms across the curriculum. The Boomer Cultural Studies model seems to have similar connotations for teachers of English in Australia many of whom resent the notion that they can or ought to be metamorphosed into teachers of cultural studies, an area which is seen by many to have peripheral rather than central status.

Yet all these models contain positives. Even the much maligned skills model can be argued to have potential good if one does not simply align it with a single methodology. The cultural heritage model has as its fundamental basis the generation of cultural continuity and the democratic maintenance of tradition; it serves to inculcate, broaden and deepen cultural development; and it affords opportunities for affective development. The cultural studies proposal has many of the same advantages and, in addition, would also be argued by some to have the advantage of providing a content for English. The personal growth model places the individual firmly at the centre, responsible for his own learning destiny through building upon his own personal experience. The teacher is not all knowing officiator in this model but a learning facilitator ready to negotiate moves with the individual.

The problem for the profession at least in Australia has been the inadequacy of all these models in terms of communicating the central thrusts of the English teaching profession beyond its own confines. We have been singularly unsuccessful in communicating to professionals in other curriculum areas, to parents, to the educational community, and to the wider general community. We lack the organizational structures for that communication and consequently have suffered the "back to basics/forward to fundamentals" swings which, in essence, come painfully close to epitomizing community understanding of what English is all about.

Let me share with you the concern that is very much at the forefront of the profession's consciousness in Victoria at the moment. I quote from the Report of the VATE

Working Party on English in the Integrated Curriculum which was tabled about the time I left Australia to come here.

In proposing new curriculum structures for English one is conscious of the dual needs to break out of earlier ways of looking at the role of English and the English teacher and yet not to discard the good we have had with the bad or non-functional we have come to recognize. The tentative model which I propose does not make large claims for divergent originality; rather it takes and attempts to build upon the strengths we have appreciated in previous models. It is a lateral proposition based, indeed strongly founded, in their strengths.

In the light of both of these areas of concern some action is clearly needed. I would argue, however, that we do not need new models for the teaching of English so much as we need a new structure or organizing framework which will enable us to retain the centrality of English and communicate effectively to our consumers. In proposing a new curriculum structure for English one is conscious of the dual needs to break out of earlier ways of looking at the role of English and the English teacher and yet not to discard the good we have had with the bad or non-functional we have come to recognize. The tentative structural model which I propose does not make large claims for divergent originality; rather it takes and attempts to build upon the strengths we have appreciated in previous models. It is a lateral proposition based, indeed strongly founded, in their strengths.

In Victoria the conversation about curriculum in the final years of secondary education is formalized in public documents such as the VISE proposals for changes in the Year 12 HSC program, the Ministerial Review of Post

Compulsory Schooling (the 'Blackburn Report') and the Ministerial Paper No. 6 produced by the State Board of Education..

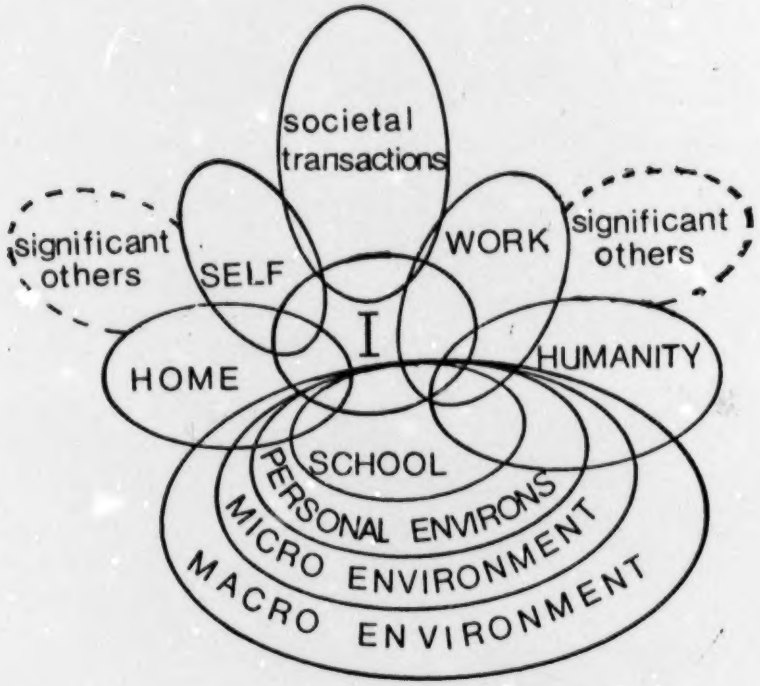
An underlying principle in these documents is a belief in a broadly-based, general education as opposed to curricula based on defined disciplines and specific skills. We believe that there is a similar focus in curriculum discussions in other states.

We therefore suggest that it is appropriate to once again identify the place and importance of English in the curriculum. The AATE as a national body needs to take a definitive position on the place of English, thus providing guidance to state associations.

Two general areas of concern were identified:

(i) Integration of English into other areas of the curriculum, e.g. General Studies, Humanities, Cultural Studies, could place the central elements of English at risk;

(ii) the notion of English as a 'service course' for other subjects (a notion which appears to underlie much of Ministerial Paper No. 6), is one which could put many facets of English, in particular Literature, at risk.



THE INDIVIDUAL IN HIS/HER WORLD

A PERSON-PROCESS MODEL OF ENGLISH TEACHING

The model focusses very clearly and centrally on the individual - but it serves to locate the individual in his his or her life context or world. The base spheres represent, in order of the importance with which they impinge on the individual in our society, the spatial/environmental contexts in which he/she must learn to operate. These overlap and relate to a number of people oriented contexts in which the individual must interact and transact through listening and speaking, reading and writing.

Essentially a person - process model, this framework attempts to provide the teacher with an overview of the facets of the individual's world and a perspective on those contexts to which the teacher might properly make a contribution. The **self** is included not because it is seen as separate from the individual but because the self and self image are the means by which the individual interacts and transacts. Each of us has a persona which enables us to move out into the world; the development of that persona provides a focus for much of what is currently attempted in English classrooms especially in relation to personal development, self-image, self-esteem etc.

The **home** clearly has some points of interaction with the school but they are not necessarily extensive or deep. Yet the home is a powerful context for the child especially in relation to language; how might the teacher build upon and extend these beginnings?
Significant others refers to those people - peers, other adults, extended family members - who, at particular times and through idiosyncratic circumstances, become important to the individual. This group is included with a dotted line to indicate that this is a sphere in which teacher/school influence is likely to be minimal or

incidental - and this group is included on both sides of the model to indicate that their source is likely to be multifarious.

The world of **work** (whether paid employment or voluntary occupations) and the **societal transactions** which are unavoidale elements of the life of an adult in our society provide essential contexts for language learning. Leisure is not included specifically in the structure partly because it pervades each of the contexts and partly because the teacher has little access to or potential influence on this language context. The mass of humanity provides the context for the individual to locate in the stream of humankind, to develop a socio-cultural matrix, to shape attitudes and values in relation to the complexities of a myriad of world views and to respond to socio-linguistic diversity. Literature and Art are central here.

The spatial contexts of the individual provide another set of two-way mirrors, visions from which a teacher may derive a whole range of relevant language learning scenarios. The **school** is obviously the first level but it clearly cannot be seen to exist in a vacuum; bridges must lead clearly out to encompass other facets and levels. The three spheres which form the base of the model are especially important. The level of the individual's **personal environs** reflects that idiosyncratic mix of micro environments which constitutes any individual's life space - very much in the Lewinian sense. The **micro environment** refers to the objective micro environment to which the individual has immediate access. The **macro environment** encompasses the broader environment to which the individual has potential or surrogate access through visual, aural and print media, or actual access through travel.

There is not time today to develop this model in detail; I should perhaps have entitled it Towards a Person - Process model of English teaching. Its potential lies in its capacity to provide an organizing principle for the teaching of English and a developed rationale for its centrality in the curriculum.

Diana F. Davis.
Copyright, 1984.